

The appearance of white settlers

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The first Europeans with whom the Wadatika had contact were trappers who explored the area looking for beaver in the 1820's, 30's and 40's. By the late 1840's, the relations between the Indians and the Whites were already strained. By that time many Whites were moving through the area on the Oregon Trail on their way to western Oregon and the coast. Epidemics of smallpox, cholera, and other diseases brought into the area by Europeans had swept through the tribe in the 1830's and 1840's. The diseases killed many Indians, especially the young and the elderly tribal members.

Settlers first moved into what is now Harney County as late as 1862, years after settlers poured into western Oregon. Cattlemen then quickly began to take land or buy up homesteads to run their huge herds of livestock over the land. The limits of the native ecology were severely stressed due to the grazing of livestock by the expanding foreign population and the increase in hunting and fishing by those same people. Resources depended upon by the Paiute people were depleted or destroyed. But, as the Paiutes noticed, the settlers brought with them resources of their own--those very livestock and horses that were eating and trampling the Wadatika's food supplies. Raiding wagon trains and camps increased as more outsiders came through the Wadatika's territory and destroyed their livelihood. By the 1840's the northern Paiute bands had acquired horses and guns, and such raids became an important way for the Wadatika people to defend themselves and survive. In response, the U.S. Army set up its first military outpost, Camp Alvord, in 1864. By 1867 Fort Harney was established.

While the tribes to the north (the Cayuse, Umatilla, Wallawalla, Wasco, John Day, Deschutes and Tygh) were confined to the Umatilla and Warm Springs reservations by 1856, the northern Paiutes continued their seasonal migrations for another decade. During these years the fighting between the Indians and the encroaching Whites became bitter, with the raids on wagon trains and army surveyors increasing. Punishing parties were sent out by the Whites to kill any Indian seen, whether man, woman or child. The Indians were fighting for their land, culture and their very lives.